DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 151 666 CG 012 263

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TITLE Is There a Motive to Avoid Success in Women?
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 20p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Achievement; Behavior Theories; *Failure Factors; *Fear; *Females; *Motivation; Personality Development; Role Perception; State of the Art Reviews; *Success Factors
IDENTIFIERS *Fear of Success

ABSTRACT

The motive to avoid success (M-S) is a stable personality disposition acquired early in life in conjunction with sex role standards which acts as an inhibiting factor in achievement motivation. Horner (1968) postulates that many women experience anxiety in competitive situations and learn to fear success because of its incongruence with the traditional feminine role. M-S is conceived of within the expectancy value theory and is only one factor in the overall assessment of achievement motivation. To explain M-S in terms of this theory, the assessment and measurement of fear of success and its role in predicting behavior is presented in conjunction with earlier research on achievement motivation. The paper concentrates on three areas: (1) methodological and theoretical criticisms of M-S research (validity and reliability of measurement, fear of success as a situational variable, M-S as a reflection of sex role stereotypes); (2) explanation of M-S within the Expectancy-Value theory of motivation and supporting research; and (3) suggestions for further research. (Author)

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IS THERE A MOTIVE TO AVOID SUCCESS IN WOMEN?

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ABSTRACT

The motive to avoid success ($M-_s$) is a stable personality disposition acquired early in life in conjunction with sex role standards and acts as an inhibiting factor in achievement motivation. Horner (1968) postulates that many women experience anxiety in competitive situations and learn to fear success because of its incongruence with the traditional feminine role. $M-_s$ is conceived of within the expectancy value theory and is only one factor in the overall assessment of achievement motivation. To explain $M-_s$ in terms of this theory, the assessment and measurement of fear of success and its role in predicting behaviour is presented in conjunction with earlier research on achievement motivation. The paper concentrates on three areas: (1) methodological and theoretical criticisms of $M-_s$ research (validity and reliability of measurement, fear of success as a situational variable, $M-_s$ as a reflection of sex role stereotypes), (2) explanation of $M-_s$ within the Expectancy-Value theory of motivation and supporting research and (3) suggestions for further research.

IS THERE A MOTIVE TO AVOID SUCCESS IN WOMEN?[1]

Horner (1968) first postulated the motive to avoid success (M_{-s}), a stable personality disposition inhibiting achievement motivation in women. The motive was investigated by projective testing in response to a sex appropriate cue. "At the end of her (his) first-term finals Ann (John) finds herself (himself) at the top of her (his) medical school class." Horner found that females produced negative imagery in about 65% of the stories, frequently composing themes of social rejection, loss of femininity, and cue denial. Men, on the other hand, responded with less than 10% negative imagery. Horner suggested that women learn to expect negative consequences from success due to incongruence with sex role standards and therefore experience anxiety in competitive situations. The motive to avoid success was conjectured to be most apparent in high achieving women in competitive situations with men. Horner actually tested women on math and verbal skills alone and in mixed sex competition and found that subjects low in fear of success (FOS) performed significantly better under competitive circumstances than alone while the reverse was true for high FOS women. This was an important step in explaining previous inconsistent results in the investigation of achievement motivation in women.

CRITICISMS OF M_{-s}

Horner's postulations concerning the motive to avoid success in women has induced a burgeoning mass of empirical data, yet unsynthesized,

and several major criticisms of its motivational conceptualization, assessment and application. The most frequent criticisms centre on the unconventional development of the projective assessment and the potentially unreliable nature of the measurement technique. The establishment of fear of success as an independent motivational component has also been questioned with opponents maintaining that it should be viewed as a situational variable or as merely reflective of contemporary sex role stereotypes.

Tresemer (1974) notes that Horner did not adopt the conventional method of establishing and isolating a motive. Typically, projective stories from an aroused group form the basis of a scoring system which is applied to themes from a neutral group. In the traditional sense Horner did not compare themes of aroused and neutral groups, but rather, established her own criteria. Stories were scored motive present if they exhibited negative affect due to success, instrumental activity away from success, anticipation of negative consequences because of success, denial of effort or situation or bizarre, non-adaptive responses (Horner, 1972). However, Horner's criteria appeared valid as fear of success (FOS) imagery emerged as a consistent predictor of behavioural responses in achievement oriented situations. In particular, women displaying FOS imagery in projective responses performed significantly worse on math and verbal skills in competitive circumstances than alone.

Projective assessment of the motive to avoid success is also criticized on its potential unreliability. With no extensive scoring manual available and a simple present/absent classification procedure, large amounts of subjectivity necessarily come into play. Although the test-retest reliability reported by Moore (1974) of .73 appears substantial, and intertester reliability estimated at .80-.90 by

Zuckerman & Wheeler (1975), there is a wide variation in FOS imagery over studies. This may be partially accounted for by the fact that females have a tendency to score stories motive-present more often than males (Robbins & Robbins, 1973), but with homogenity reliability of fantasy based measured of achievement motivation calculated at only .30-.40 (Entwisle, 1972), it is difficult to attribute reported discrepancies to treatment effects or method variance. The fact that most researchers have found a low or non-existent correspondence over cues argues for the latter explanation (Alper, 1974; Karabenick & Marshall, 1974; Morgan & Mausner, 1973; Tresemer, 1974; Weston & Mednick, 1970).

But given the potential unreliability of the measurement how does the motive to avoid success stand up under test conditions? One of Horner's basic tenets is that women exhibiting M_s feel unsexed by success and experience the most anxiety in competition with men. Murphy-Berman (1975) attempted to test this underlying assumption by questioning women after they had been engaged in competitive tasks. FOS subjects did not estimate that their male partners wanted to be with them less after success than failure or that their partners viewed them less feminine after success. Nevertheless, Makosky (1972), Parker (1972) and Sorrentino & Short (1974) discovered that FOS women perform optimally on a task labelled feminine.

Horner asserts that women who evince M_s perform worse in competition with men than with other women or working alone. This has been empirically demonstrated by Groszko & Morganstern (cited in Makosky, 1972), Parker (1972), Makosky (1972), Allen & Boivan (1976), and Hyatt, Cooper & Allan (1970). Further support is offered by Karabenick & Marshall (1974) and Karabenick, Marshall & Karabenick (1976) who found that women who are high in both fear of success and

fear of failure depress performances in competitive situations. Zaro (1972) reported that women who are high in FOS react more cooperatively in competitive circumstances than low FOS women; likewise, Bongort (1974) found high FOS women more cooperative in the prisoner's dilemma. However, results from Althof (1973), Feather & Simon (1973), Karabenick (1972), Morgan & Mausner (1973) and Zanna (1973) do not reflect these trends.

A further criticism of FOS investigation comes from those researchers who have expanded the original Horner design to allow both sexes to respond to the male and female stimulus persons (SPs). Results have been inconclusive although the majority of studies report FOS imagery most prevalent in response to a female SP (Alper, 1974; Brown, Jennings & Vanik, 1974; Feather & Simon, 1973; Feather & Raphelson, 1974; Monahan, Kuhn & Shaver, 1974; Prescott, 1971; Solomon, 1975; Wellens, 1973; Winchel, Fenner & Shaver, 1974). However, Hoffman (1974), Jackaway (1974), Katz (1973), Kimball (1973), Krusell (1973), Levine & Crumrine (1975), Robbins & Robbins (1973) and Tresemer (1974) found no significant difference in the proportion of FOS imagery in response to male and female stimulus persons. The former, supported by Zuckerman & Wheeler (1975), maintain that projective techniques for the assessment of M_s may be merely tapping sex role stereotypes rather than providing a valid motivational measurement. This is because men tend to respond with very high proportions of negative imagery to female cues, while females produce predominantly positive stories for male cues.

Although these studies yield popular or sensational results, in terms of assessment of motivation, sex appropriateness of stimulus person is a crucial factor. A consistent body of research on measurement and development of achievement motivation has been derived from

male subjects in response to male TAT figures (Atkinson, 1958). But responses of female subjects to male TAT figures do not conform to the same patterns. Wilcox (1951), Veroff, Wilcox & Atkinson (1953) and French & Lesser (1964) found that although achievement imagery in women was greater in response to male pictures, it did not increase in achievement oriented situations. Nor do female cues accurately measure achievement motivation in males. Veroff (1950) found that achievement imagery is low for high school males in response to female pictures, and that there is little change from neutral to aroused conditions. In this instance McClelland et al. (1953) conclude that "male pictures provide a measurement of achievement motivation, female pictures do not (p. 168)." They do not conclude that measurement of achievement motivation is merely reflective of sex role stereotypes because males respond with less achievement imagery to female cues.

Indeed, if motivational assessment is based on identification and projection as suggested by Atkinson (1958), presentation of a same sexed SP is most appropriate in facilitating this process. By contrast, reliance on extrinsic factors, e.g. stereotypes, is more probable when responding to a cross sexed SP. This does not mean that the measurement of achievement motivation by projective techniques is solely delineating the pervading sex role stereotypes but rather that an appropriate stimulus is required to obtain a valid response.

The importance of a sex appropriate stimulus person is further corroborated by Murray (1943) in the development of the TAT technique:

> Experience has shown that in the long run the stories obtained are more revealing and the validity of the interpretations increased if most of the pictures include a person who is of the same sex as the subject (p2).

and has been empirically demonstrated by Wayner & Lindskold (1976);

subjects project more of their own characteristics on SPs they perceive to be similar.

Finally, there is the argument proposed by Condry & Dyer (1976) that fear of success should be considered as a situational rather than a motivational variable. This rests on the assumption that social norms imply the existence of an extrinsic social reward structure, positively valuing acceptance of norms and actively punishing deviation. In these terms, fear of success is seen as a set of realistic expectancies concerning the negative consequences of deviancy, from a set of cultural norms for sex appropriate behaviour. While this argument is plausible, even favourable in light of masses of contradictory evidence, it is not antithetical with Horner's notion of M.s. The discrepancy lies in the tendency for Condry & Dyer to dismiss FOS as merely a reflection of realistic discrepancies while Horner maintains that these expectancies are incorporated into personality dispositions and directly affect motivation.

The latter two criticisms reflect a naive and simplistic approach to achievement motivation and a misunderstanding of the Expectancy-Value theory from which M_s is derived. Atkinson & Feather's (1966) theory of achievement motivation states that the strength of one's motivation to achieve success (T_s) is a product of the multiplicative interaction of the strength of the motive to succeed (M_s), the expectancy of success (P_s) and the incentive value of succes (I_s); $T_s = M_s \times P_s \times I_s$. The motive refers to a latent disposition to strive for a particular goal, state or aim. Expectancies concerning success reflect the <u>probability</u> that the performance will induce a specific consequence and the <u>incentive</u> or value, the type and magnitude of reward. While the motive <u>per se</u> may be relatively stable, expectancies are situational; therefore, the total motivation, and consequently, achievement performance,

will vary as the motivational components alter. Atkinson refers to motivation as the aroused state which exists when a motive has been engaged by the appropriate expectancy - i.e. that performances of an act is instrumental to attainment of the goal of the motive.

The relationship, then, between motive and performance is not simple or direct. Atkinson & Reitman (1954) have demonstrated that a correspondence between M_s and performance is only consistent when the former is accompanied by positive expectancies. If other motives such as affiliation or power are aroused in conjunction with the achievement motive, the positive correlation further deterioriates.

According to Atkinson (1958), total motivation for performance of an act will be the sum of contributions made by particular motives engaged. In the case of achievement motivation both the motive toward success (T_s) and the motive to avoid failure (T_f) are considered important contributors to the overall manifestation. Within this framework, a consistent body of data has been established on the sources, measurement and development of achievement motivation in men. But the framework is incomplete in that it neither explains sex differences nor distinguishes between competitive and non-competitive situations. To alleviate this deficiency, Horner postulates that the measurement of achievement motivation should incorporate the motive to avoid success; this can be expressed mathematically as: $T_a = (T_s - T_{-f}) - T_{-s}$.

Explanation of the theory of achievement motivation in a broader context unveils inherent misconceptions in the "stereotype" and "situational" criticisms of the M_{-s}. Horner conceptualizes the motive as a stable personality disposition acquired early in life in conjunction with sex role standards. It is precisely the stereotypic notions of masculinity/femininity and success related ideology which influence

expectancies about achievement behaviour. In particular, women learn to fear success in anticipation of negative consequences - loss of femininity and social desirability. These expectancies, a prime motivational component, decrease the value of success. Condry & Dyer refer to fear of success as "realistic expectancies about the negative consequences of deviancy from a set of cultural norms for sex appropriate behaviour" and advocate its consideration as a situational variable without the apparent realization that the situational nature of these expectancies is already accounted for in comprehensive motivational terms and that their proposition is not antithetical with Horner's conceptualization.

SUPPORT FOR M_s

Variation in Cues and Subjects:

Horner's original cue contained three main components: female success in a competitive, male-dominated field. Several studies have examined responses to variation in the cue and there is a tendency for FOS to alter in stereotypic fashion. Breedlove & Cicirelli (1974) assessed the M_s in response to female achievement in medicine and education and found the proportion of FOS significantly higher in the first instance. Lockheed (1975) found the proportion of FOS diminished in response to a female cue when the medical school class was described as 50% female. It appears that when an occupation is defined as deviant for women, a higher percentage of FOS imagery is elicited. However, Hoffman (1974) presented students with three variations of Horner's cue: a less masculine field (child psychology), achievement communicated privately, and competition minimized. None of these variables diminished FOS. Variations in extraneous factors in the cue have also been investigated and apparently effect the proportion of FOS imagery. For

example, Spence's (1974) research indicates that the marital status of a female SP may effect the quantity and quality of FOS imagery.

For the most part women are found to evince more FOS than men (Horner, 1968, 1972; Feather & Simon, 1973; Monahan et al., 1974; Prescott, 1971), although Levine & Crumrine (1973) and Morgan & Mausner (1973) reported a higher proportion of FOS in the latter. Likewise, white women appear more prone to FOS than blacks. Horner (1972) and Weston & Mednick (1970) reported less FOS imagery in black than white women. Puryear & Mednick (1974) also found FOS less prevalent in blacks; in addition the M_{-s} was associated with militant black attitudes, particularly in those women who had no attachment to a man. These results appear to be consistent with the view of the black matriarchal society which forces the woman to be more autonomous. Black men, on the other hand, display greater proportions of FOS than either white men or black women (Horner, 1972).

Feather & Raphelson's (1974) crosscultural study revealed a higher incidence of FOS in Australian university women (47%) as compared to American women (27%). It has been suggested that more rigid stereotypes maintained in Australia may be conducive to greater FOS in these women. Weinreich (in press) reported 44.5%, FOS in a British sample.

FOS does appear to be positively correlated with age beginning in early adolescence and increasing with highlighted sexual awareness. Baruch (1975) established an increase of FOS imagery in students from fifth to tenth grade (10-15 years). This is corroborated by Lavach & Lanier (1975) with seventh and tenth grade samples, Horner & Rhoem (1968) with seventh and eleventh grade subjects, and Kimball & Leahy (1974) with fourth to tenth grade children.

But investigations of the relation between academic major and the

M_s have yielded contradictory results. Horner (1969) and Patty (1972) found a concentration of FOS females in traditional fields. Horner reported 89% FOS stories from women in traditional areas as opposed to 43% from those in nontraditional endeavours. However, Gearty and Milner (1975) found no relation between M_s and academic majors, nor did Moore (1972) who tested women in law, nursing, graduate arts and sciences. The M_s has been reported to be more prevalent in honour students (Horner, 1974) women of high academic ability (Hoffman, 1974; Kresojevich, 1972; Sorrentino & Short, 1974) and females attending coeducational institutions (Wichel, Fenner & Shaver, 1974).

FOS and Personality:

Because Horner maintains that the M_s is a stable personality disposition, various attempts have been made to correlate FOS with specific personality traits and personal attitudes and ambitions. Patty (1972) found that although FOS women are highly career oriented they lack actual dedication. They are most frequently concentrated in traditional occupations and commonly display feelings of self inadequacy and self criticism. Parker (1972) discovered that high FOS women view home and family as most important while low FOS women place emphasis on career orientation. Although this seems contradictory at first glance, these results neatly fit into Horner's conceptualization of FOS. High FOS women must view the home and family as valuable in order to experience the role conflict which inhibits achievement motivation. In addition, high FOS women are also characterized by their academic competence and career orientation. It is the combination of ability and acceptance of the traditional female role which produces the achievement related anxiety. Along these lines women who score low on FOS view themselves as more feminine (Makosky, 1972; Parker, 1972).

However, contrary to expectation Baruch (1975) found that women who are low in FOS produce higher stereotype scores, while Alper (1974) and Tresemer & Pleck related FOS to traditional stereotyping and attitudes.

In practical application to the academic setting Curtis, Zanna and Campbell (1975) reported that females displaying the M_{-s} are less satisfied with law school and very reluctant to volunteer answers in class. Along these lines Horner (1972) found that girls evincing FOS experienced anxiety about success and refused to divulge the fact that they were doing well academically. Sixty-seven per cent would more likely tell their boyfriends they had gotten on average a superior mark; whereas 100 per cent of those low in FOS would more likely report the latter. Schwenn (1970) suggests that the major role in the arousal of FOS is played by girls' male peers, and this is supported by Peplau (1976) who found that a combination of FOS and traditional sex roles attitudes adversely affects competitive performances against boyfriends.

On the whole, although results are not conclusive, empirical trends tend to support Horner's conceptualization of M_{-s} as a debilitating anxiety in achievement oriented situations. There is a tendency for FOS to be most frequently elicited by female success in male dominated fields and to be more apparent in psychologically feminine women. The conflict between success and femininity and a decline in achievement oriented behaviour is most apparent in competition with men in specifically masculine endeavours. There is also a tendency for M_{-s} to emerge at puberty and increase with heightened sexual role awareness. In short sex role learning adversely affects achievement motivation in women.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

For the most part, researchers have devoted much time to amassing empirical data and neglecting its critical synthesis into a comprehensive motivational theory. Despite burgeoning masses of literature devoted to fear of success it is difficult to assess the current status of M_{-s}. In this light, several criticisms and suggestions can be made.

1. Although the use of projective techniques is intrinsically subject to criticisms of validity and reliability, a more extensive scoring manual for M_{-s} is required. Only then can large discrepancies in the proportion of FOS imagery among studies be attributed to treatment effects rather than measuremental unreliability.

2. For a valid measure of achievement motivation, sex appropriate SPs are required. Responses to cross-sexed SPs may reflect "attitudes" about success and failure but do not necessarily adequately index motives.

3. The M_{-s} should be considered within the context of the Expectancy-Value theory of motivation. Naive and simplistic attempts to relate FOS imagery to personality, attitudes and performance will be largely unsuccessful; emphasis should be switched from the <u>imagery</u> to the <u>motive</u>.

4. More research should be devoted to the relationship between M_{-s} and performance. Results, to date, are not conclusive and establishment of a reliable relationship would argue for the validation of M_{-s} as an independent component of achievement motivation.

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